

SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ABANDONED GAS STATION - DAY

JONAH, a cowboy, stands alone at an abandoned gas station. He looks off into the distance.

Far away, he sees a man (LI'L BEAVER), approaching on a HOBBYHORSE.

Jonah continues to watch him as he rides. He takes a sip out of a CAN OF BEANS, then takes a bite out of a MEXICAN SNACK CAKE.

Li'l Beaver reaches Jonah, a BAG OF MONEY in his hand. He "dismounts" the hobbyhorse. He tosses Jonah the bag of money.

Jonah opens it up and looks it over.

JONAH
This ain't all of it.

LI'L BEAVER
(nervously)
Whaddya mean? It's all there.

Jonah stands.

JONAH
No it ain't, Li'l Beaver. What happened to the rest of it?

Li'l Beaver stammers.

Jonah approaches him and puts his revolver to Li'l Beaver's chin.

Li'l Beaver continues to shake and sweat, more profusely now.

JONAH (CONT'D)
I said—What happened to the rest of it?

LI'L BEAVER
It wadn't my fault, Jonah! He pointed a gun to mah head just like yer doin now!

JONAH
Who?

LI'L BEAVER
W-w-w-w-

JONAH
WHO?

LI'L BEAVER
Wicked Pete!

JONAH
Wicked Pete?

CUT TO:

EXT. GHOST TOWN - DAY

We see WICKED PETE—an unmistakable old west outlaw in a *lucha libre* mask.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

JONAH lowers his REVOLVER from LI'L BEAVER'S chin.

Li'l Beaver relaxes a bit.

LI'L BEAVER
(still stammering)
He told me to tell you—

JONAH
What?

LI'L BEAVER
(backing away)
He told me tell you—if you want
the rest, you'll have to face
him...

JONAH
Where?

LI'L BEAVER
High noon tomorruh—South of the
Border.

MUSIC HIT

JONAH
South of the Border...the
bastard...

LI'L BEAVER

What's the matter with South of the
Border?

JONAH

There's one too many people
there...

Jonah starts off.

JONAH (CONT'D)

I better get going if I wanna get
there by high noon.

LI'L BEAVER

Lemme come with you, boss. That
Wicked Pete's one nasty fella—

JONAH

I've told you this before, Li'l
Beaver—I work alone.

LI'L BEAVER

Aw, c'mon, Jonah—you know there
ain't nothin' in the cowboy
handbook 'at says you gotta work
alone!

JONAH

I've told you this before too, Li'l
Beaver—I make my own rules.

He mounts a HOBBYHORSE and sets off.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY

JONAH crosses the desert on his HOBBYHORSE to "TAKE YOU BACK"
by Orville Peck.

OPENING CREDITS

EXT. SOUTH OF THE BORDER - DUSK

JONAH arrives at South of the Border—a kitschy tourist stop
with restaurants, a motel, a park, and countless roadside
sculptures.

JONAH

I've always hated this town...

He lays eyes on a STATUE OF PEDRO, the town's mascot.

JONAH (CONT'D)
 (tips his hat)
 Howdy, Pedro.

He gallops in.

As he gallops through the town, he finds it strangely quiet, despite its gaudy appearance. A PLASTIC BAG rolls through the streets like a tumbleweed.

THUGS, some hiding out, some in plain sight, stare at him as he rides.

He is puzzled by them.

INT. STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

The steakhouse is next to empty. A lousy tune plays over the speakers. PABLO (40s-60s), the bartender, stands at the bar, cleaning out glasses.

JONAH enters.

The few PATRONS of the restaurant stop eating, looking up at the familiar man.

His eyes are locked on Pablo as he approaches the bar.

Hearing the footsteps, Pablo turns around to see Jonah. His face is filled with something between respect and fear.

PABLO
 Jonah! *¡No me lo creo! ¡Hola, señor!* I didn't think we would ever see you again!

Jonah sits at the bar.

PABLO (CONT'D)
 What can I get you to drink?

JONAH
 The usual.

PABLO
 The usual...
 Jarritos! Lime! Coming right up, señor!

He grabs Jonah's DRINK from below the bar, places it on the counter and opens it.

PABLO (CONT'D)
So—what brings you back to South
of the Border, my friend?

JONAH
We ain't friends, amigo.

He sips his drink.

PABLO
(with reverence)
I don't suppose it was to
see...Esperan—

JONAH
(pulls gun on him)
Don't even say her name!

PABLO
Sorry, señor...

JONAH
Anyway, Wicked Pete's got a fistful
of dollars that belong to me. Said
he wanted to meet me here.

PABLO
Wicked Pete... I see. When's the
showdown?

A BANDIT, wielding TWO PISTOLS, bursts into the restaurant.

BANDIT
Alright everybody, stick 'em up!
This is a robbery!

Pablo throws his hands in the air. Jonah remains seated,
cooly.

The Bandit races over to the bar, points a gun at Pablo.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
Give me all your money!

PABLO
Jonah...do something!!

Jonah remains seated, does nothing.

BANDIT
I said give me all you money!

Pablo, sweating profusely, timidly starts to go through the
cash register.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
That's right...*rapido!!*

Jonah eyes the bandit.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
(noticing him)
What are you looking at, blondie?

Jonah sips his Jarritos.

BANDIT (CONT'D)
Jarritos? Heh! What are you, a
man—or a niño?
(laughs hysterically)

Jonah stands.

The Bandit is taken aback.

JONAH
What'd you call me?

BANDIT
(panicking)
Uh...I didn't call you anything,
señor...I just found it funny that
you were drinking Jarritos—

JONAH
And what's so funny about Jarritos?

BANDIT
Nothing!
(to camera)
They've been adding *sabor* to life
the same way since 1950!

JONAH
Ride like the wind, muchacho.

Jonah shoots at his foot.

The Bandit leaps up in fear.

Jonah shoots at his feet until he is out the door.

A sigh of relief runs through the restaurant, with some
patrons APPLAUDING Jonah.

Jonah returns to the bar, where Pablo is patting himself down
with a RAG.

PABLO
Ay cielos, thank you, Jonah. Great
 work with that bit about Jarritos—

JONAH
 That wasn't a bit.

PABLO
 Huh?

JONAH
 A man's got it coming if he knocks
 my Jarritos.

He takes his bottle from the bar.

JONAH (CONT'D)
 Listen Pablo, who's running this
 place these days?

PABLO
 Well Jonah, you may have been
 surprised that he called you here,
 but the truth is...Wicked Pete's
 been head hancho for months now.

JONAH
 (scoffs)
 No foolin?

PABLO
Sí. He raided the place, and he's
 been top chimichanga ever since.
 It's been misery—so many people
 leave...no tourists
 anymore...business's only been good
 for one fella, now.

JONAH
 Who's that?

Pablo points to a MAN BUILDING A COFFIN. The man smiles and
 waves.

Jonah rises.

JONAH (CONT'D)
 I wanna speak with the sheriff,
 Pablo. That Enrique fella still in
 charge?

PABLO
 No, you see...
 (snap zoom)
 ...there's a new sheriff in town.

CUT TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

SHERIFF STUBBS (30s), dressed in over-the-top "singing cowboy" getup, sits at his desk, listening to an episode of "The Lone Ranger" on a small PORTABLE RADIO.

JONAH enters the sheriff's office, stands in shadow.

SHERIFF
 (chipper)
 Howdy, Mister! What can I do you
 for?

JONAH
 Name's Jonah.

The Sheriff stands to greet Jonah, illuminated brightly by an overhead light.

SHERIFF
 Pleased to meet ya, amigo! Don't
 believe I've seen you 'round these
 parts before! Put 'er there!

He extends his hand. Jonah does not take it.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
 How can I help you, muchacho?

JONAH
 Wicked Pete owes me a couple
 hundred simoleons, and he called me
 here to duel me for it. I heard he
 runs the place now.

SHERIFF
 Ha! I don't know if I'd say he's
 running the place—

JONAH
 Those his thugs I saw when I was
 ridin' in?

SHERIFF
 Well...yeah—

JONAH

Then I'd say he's running the place.

SHERIFF

Well feller, I'll level with you—Pete's a spicy pepper, but he's nothing in the long run. And in the end, he's nothing to be afraid of cause ya know—the good'll always triumph over the bad.

JONAH

I s'pose you're the good?

SHERIFF

(too energetic)
Yessir!

JONAH

I see. Listen, I really came by just to ask you if Pete's got any particular beef with this town. He and I got our own can of worms, but I just wanna know why he's set up shop here in particular.

SHERIFF

(thinks for a moment)
Only thing I know is that he says there's a feller he knows he can swindle if he set up shop here. Said that feller's got a big stake waiting in this town. Don't s'pose that feller coulda been you?

JONAH

Sharp shootin, Tex.

Jonah turns and begins to walk out.

SHERIFF

Say, Mister!

He looks back.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

If you and Wicked Pete's dueling tomorrow...I want to do all I can to help ya out. Anything I can do to serve a just cause.

JONAH

Listen, Stubbs—I don't take no help from some howdy doody singin' cowboy sheriff out to save the day. I work alone. And if you knew what was between Pete and me, your straight-n-narrow compass wouldn't want you trekking down that path.

Sheriff Stubbs is heartbroken. Jonah exits.

EXT. MOTOR INN - DUSK

JONAH, a ROOM KEY in hand, walks by the doors of the Motor Inn, looking for his room.

At the corner, he passes by a young woman (CONSUELA) smoking a cigarette.

CONSUELA

Well, well, well... tell the minister that Jonah has finally arrived in Nineveh.

He turns to see her.

JONAH

Howdy, Consuela. Still in the lollipop business, I see.

CONSUELA

(chuckles)

To a bunch of suckers. What about you, Jonah? Are you in the mood for candy tonight?

JONAH

I prefer more nutritious eating.

CONSUELA

(smiling)

Admit it Jonah—you just don't have a sweet tooth.

He is silent. She begins to walk away.

CONSUELA (CONT'D)

Well, tough guy, if you get tired of beans and tomatoes, you know dessert's always on the house.

She walks off.

Jonah stares at her, shakes his head, and lights a cigarette.

Looking off, he sees the Mexico Shop in the distance—lights still on, "OPEN" sign off. A bereft look on his face. He strolls toward the shop.

CUT TO:

INT. MEXICO SHOP - NIGHT

JONAH walks through the lobby of the Mexico Shop and into the main shopping center.

In the midst of the plethora of kitschy merchandise, he sees ESPERANZA (20s), sweeping the floor.

She looks up and immediately recognizes him.

ESPERANZA
We're closed.

JONAH
Door was open.

ESPERANZA
I don't think you're in the market
for any of this merchandise,
anyway.

He stares at her.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)
And we don't do returns.

JONAH
(becoming more earnest)
Look, Esperanza, I just wanted to
see you, that's all.

ESPERANZA
Good. Because what we had was a one-
time offer—and you missed the
sale.

She hurries off.

JONAH
I still love you, Esperanza...

She stops.

ESPERANZA
What was that?

He turns to her.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

Because last I remember, you threw me out like an empty Jarritos bottle.

JONAH

You knew me. You knew I couldn't stay shackled down in one place.

ESPERANZA

Maybe so. But I didn't know I was a pair of shackles too.

A child (MARISOL, 5) enters.

MARISOL

Mama...

Jonah is shocked.

ESPERANZA

Ay cielos, Marisol, te dije que me esperaras arriba. I told you to wait for me upstairs.

MARISOL

Estaba sola, Mama.

SUBTITLE: "I WAS LONELY, MAMA."

ESPERANZA

Ay, it's OK, my love. You know I'm always with you.

The child smiles with Esperanza. Esperanza pats her, she leaves.

JONAH

She's beautiful.

ESPERANZA

I'm glad you think so.

A beat.

ESPERANZA (CONT'D)

But I think you'll find what you're looking for in another market.

She leaves.

Jonah is heartbroken, alone in the store.

The lights go out on him.

JONAH
(comic exasperation)
Ah, nachos...

CUT TO:

INT. ESPERANZA'S HOME - NIGHT

ESPERANZA enters her studio apartment, which overlooks the town. A BLACK COWBOY BOOT is seen.

WICKED PETE (O.S.)
Howdy, darlin.

ESPERANZA
Hello, Pete.

WICKED PETE crosses the room to greet her.

WICKED PETE
Aw, c'mon darlin. You know that ain't how I like to be welcomed after a long day's work.

He embraces her from behind.

ESPERANZA
More robbing and looting?

WICKED PETE
What's it matter, so long as I keep you and your niña in business?

ESPERANZA
Leave my daughter out of this.

WICKED PETE
What did ol' Clint Eastwood want down there?

She is silent.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)
Still in love with the silver screen, eh?

She remains silent. Pete approaches her.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)
And after all I've done for you...

She stares up at him, trying her best to hide the fear in her eyes.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)
Well, don't get too attached to him. He won't be around much longer.

Wicked Pete examines his revolver.

CUT TO:

INT. JONAH'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

JONAH washes his face in his bathroom SINK.

After he finishes, he makes sure his revolver is loaded.

INT. HOT TAMALE RESTAURANT - THE NEXT MORNING

JONAH sits at a table at the restaurant. A WAITRESS takes a FAMILY's order behind him.

WAITRESS
Alright, so that's one order of tortilla chips with Magnificent Seven Layer Dip, one order of True Grits, one order of Blazing Saddles Fajitas, one order of Cry Nachos, and three glasses of the Wild Punch. Oh! And one Jarritos. Coming right up!

She approaches his table.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)
And what can I get for you, sir?

JONAH
One Big Country Platter. And can I get that with extra bacon?

WAITRESS
For a few dollars more.

He nods, hands her his menu. She walks away. Looking out the window, he sees something...

JONAH
What the...

Galloping down the main road on a HOBBYHORSE is WICKED PETE!

Jonah is shocked. He looks to the wall clock in the restaurant.

It reads 11:00.

JONAH (CONT'D)
Tuco's spurs, he's early!

Jonah rushes out of the restaurant.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOT TAMALES RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

JONAH rushes out.

WICKED PETE finds his place for the standoff.

PATRONS gather at the windows of Hot Tamale.

TOWNSPEOPLE gather around the fight, including CONSUELA, PABLO, and even LI'L BEAVER.

SHERIFF STUBBS inserts himself next to Jonah.

SHERIFF
Jonah! It's Wicked Pete! Look out!

Jonah looks at him, condescendingly.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
Oh...sorry.

He walks off.

WICKED PETE
Howdy-do, Angel Eyes.

JONAH
You know that ain't my name.

WICKED PETE
(confused)
Oh...it ain't?

Pulls out a ROLODEX.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)
Oh, yeah, I see here...
Howdy-do, Jonah!

Jonah stands his ground.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)

I reckon I got something you want...

He holds up a MONEY BAG.

JONAH

Maybe.

Wicked Pete tosses the bag between them.

WICKED PETE

Or perhaps I've got something...of
greater value to you...

THUGS produce ESPERANZA and toss her to Pete, who holds her
in front of himself.

Jonah is shocked.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)

(laughs)

I knew you didn't always stand by
"working alone"! Now Jonah—you can
leave, and she'll go unharmed—no
questions asked. But if you want
the money—you risk your
sweetheart's life. The choice is
yours.

MUSIC SWELLS as the two stare each other down, hands ready to
grab their guns.

The townspeople watch intently.

The two continue to stare each other down.

The townspeople watch intently.

The two continue to stare each other down.

The townspeople watch intently.

Jonah glances at Esperanza.

She is terrified.

WICKED PETE (CONT'D)

C'mon, Cowboy! Show me what you
want!

He looks back to Wicked Pete.

Wicked Pete glares back at him.

Jonah's hand is ready to grab his gun.

Tension fills the air.

In a flash, Jonah grabs his gun, fires, and shoots Wicked Pete's hat off of his head.

Shocked, Wicked Pete reaches for his head. Jonah shoots his gun out of his hand.

Wicked Pete runs after the gun. Jonah shoots him in the behind. Wicked Pete screams, and Jonah continues to shoot at his feet, running him out as he did the Bandit, as Esperanza races over and clings to him. Wicked Pete scurries away, and the town CHEERS.

Jonah and Esperanza stare into each other's eyes, then kiss passionately.

The townspeople continue to CHEER as the couple kisses.

Sheriff Stubbs twirls a pair of HANDCUFFS as he arrests Wicked Pete. He un.masks him as well.

PABLO

ARRIBA!

CUT TO:

EXT. PEDROLAND PARK - DUSK

JONAH strolls through the park with ESPERANZA and MARISOL. They send Marisol off to ride a ride.

JONAH

You know, I used to think of everything just like one of these rides—it was just a matter of hopping on, getting my money's worth, then hopping right off to try the next one.

ESPERANZA

And I'm guessing that changed?

JONAH

(smiles)

Now I think of it a lot more like...setting up shop.

He looks to Marisol, enjoying her ride.

He and Esperanza gaze at each other, then kiss passionately once again. In the distance, SHERIFF STUBBS gallops up on his HOBBYHORSE. He taps Jonah on the shoulder, frantically.

SHERIFF

Jonah! Jonah!

Jonah leaves the embrace and glares at the Sheriff.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Sorry to interrupt boss, but someone's trotting into town—and I think it's Señor Muertas!

CUT TO:

EXT. SOUTH OF THE BORDER OUTSKIRTS - DUSK

Señor Muertas—a Day of the Dead skeleton in a Mariachi outfit—gallops toward the city on a HOBBYHORSE, LAUGHING.

CUT BACK.

Jonah looks off into the distance, pensively.

JONAH

Well I guess something ought to be done about that. After all...

(snap zoom)

...this town ain't big enough for the two of us.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END